WHIRRAKEE

March 2015 Vol. 36 No. 2

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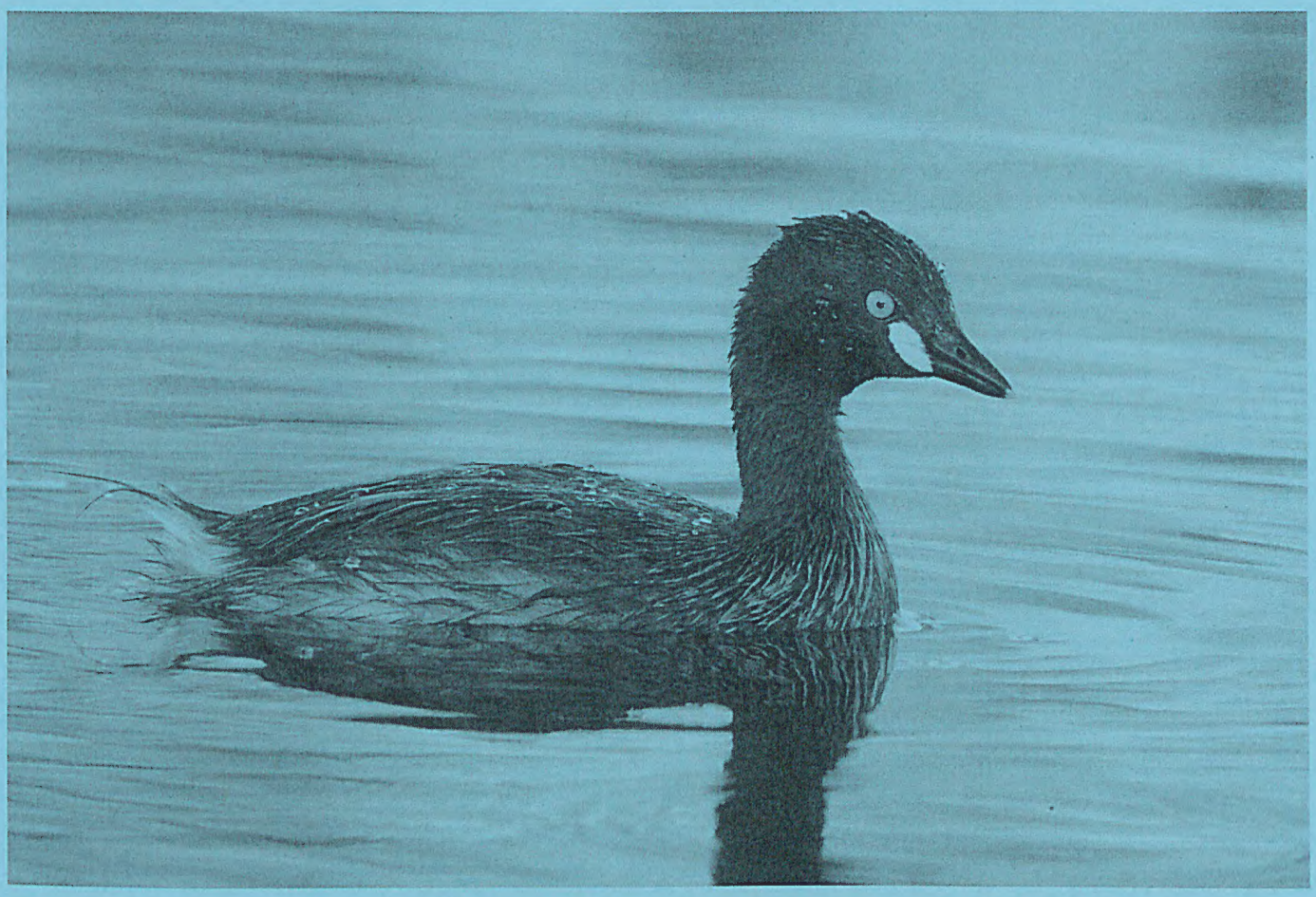

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER OF THE BENDIGO FIELD NATURALISTS CLUB

Bendigo Field Naturalists Club Inc.
Address for correspondence: PO Box 396, Bendigo 3552.
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Office Bearers for 2014 - 2015

President	Rod Orr	e-mail: r.orr@westnet.com.au	5443 5668
Vice President	Jenny Shield	e-mail: jennyshield66@gmail.com	5441 4029
Secretary/Public Officer	Matt Comer		0409 162 627
Treasurer	Ben Goonan		

Positions delegated by the Committee

Minute Secretary	*vacant*	
Excursion organiser	John Lindner	5448 3406
Syllabus organiser	Ben Goonan	
Librarian	Diana Collier & Maryann Hill	5443 0137
Garden Convenor/Secretary	Jan Orr	
Hall Management	Maurie Lewis (assisted by Rob Moors)	0407 427179
Whirrakee contact/editor	Sabine Wilkens e-mail: s.wilkens@latrobe.edu.au	5443 2797
Whirrakee mailing coordinator	Rod Orr	
Website coordinator/Webmaster	Ben Goonan	

Membership of the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is open to all those interested in Natural History. The subscription rates are: Single $40; Family $50; Concession: Single $35; Family $40. *Whirrakee* subscription only is $40.

General meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month. The venue for General meetings is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High Street, Golden Square. The meeting starts with members sharing their recent natural history observations. The invited speaker starts at 8:00pm and meetings conclude with supper. The Annual Meeting is held in September.

Committee meetings are held on the third Wednesday of each month at 5:30pm. Members of the Committee are the Office Bearer listed above and the following members: Alistair White, Kerrie Norris, John Lindner, Diana Collier, Jan Orr, Devi Shanty, Simon Hay

Excursions are conducted regularly and are advertised on the diary page of the *Whirrakee*. The assembly point for excursions is the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, unless otherwise specified. Several interclub field naturalist campouts are held every year.

The Bendigo Field Naturalists Club is actively involved in local conservation issues. An **indigenous garden** has been established around the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building. Working bees are advertised on the *Whirrakee* diary page.

Bird Observing: Club members conduct regular bird surveys. Please contact Anne Bridley 5442 6188 or Glenise Moors 5439 6254 for details. Special bird observations should be reported to Anne Bridley 5442 6188. To propose bird observing excursions please contact Kerrie Norris 5447 8017.

WHIRRAKEE

Monthly Newsletter of the Bendigo Field Naturalist Club
Vol. 36, No. 2, March 2015
Whirrakee takes its name from the Whirrakee Wattle (*Acacia williamsonii*), which is virtually endemic to the Bendigo region

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Authors are responsible for the accuracy of the information they use and also for any opinions expressed in their articles. Contributions should be posted or e-mailed to the editor at least two days prior to the last Wednesday of the month. They will be included as soon as possible after they are received, although space restrictions occasionally require shortening of articles or holding them over till the following edition of *Whirrakee*.
Articles in *Whirrakee* may be reproduced, but permission should be obtained from the Bendigo Field Naturalists Club, and acknowledgment should be given to the author and the Club. Some back issues are still available on request.

Editor's Note
It is great to see that only in the second month of the year, a full excursion program is up and running. Thanks to the new excursion committee for putting in the hard work and getting commitments from leaders. The June excursions is part of the club's 70th birthday celebration. and there is also a call for suggestions for speakers related to our clubs history and achievements (see page 3), so please put your thinking caps on. At the same time as looking back over 70 years of club history, conservation battles and marvellous discoveries, we also need to look forward and face the reality of many clubs today (see letter to the editor on page 3). Hopefully our club will continue to be fruitful and a source of knowledge, advice, initiative, fun and fellowship, so that in another 70 years time, this period is also worth celebrating. Any letters you might wish to publish in response to the one on page 3, will appear in the same place.

Front page photographer: Michael Angove (see page 5 for colour version)
This Australasian Grebe was spotted at the end of February at the old tip site. It is a shy water bird that usually dives out of sight on approach. The website 'Birds in Backyards' states…'like other grebes, the Australasian Grebe is often seen eating its own feathers and feeding them to its young. This behaviour is thought to help prevent injury from any sharp fish bones that are swallowed.'

Short Notices

Nestbox Monitoring

Discussion is under way with the ranger of Crusoe and Number 7 Parks, to assist with the monitoring and recording of fauna species utilising the park's many nestboxes.
Members who are interested in assisting with this project should contact Kerrie Norris ph. 54478017 for further details

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Suggestions sought for speakers for 2015 general meetings

If any members have suggestions for speakers or topics relevant to the Club's achievements and history, please contact Ben Goonan (e-mail:bengoonan@hotmail.com, ph 54463587, Mail: PO Box 28 North Bendigo VIC, 3550. Ideas or speaker suggestions don't need to be fully fleshed out, but a (list of) topic(s) (with some notes) and the people involved or those with some knowledge would be great.

Nine days on Tang Tang

A video camera trap on a drying wetland in north central Victoria
Produced by Adrian Martin
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RkNbCn72azY
I highly recommend this 6 minute YouTube video. It is most surprising! (ed.)

Letter to the editor

What makes a strong, healthy and vibrant association?

Many people have noticed and commented on the general trend of declining active involvement in incorporated associations, clubs and other groups (ranging from popular sporting activities to special interests) over recent times (decades?). This may be an inevitable outcome of the changing attitudes and priorities of people today, as they struggle to meet all the demands placed on them, and/or related to larger societal changes also taking place, as they constantly do. It may be something that we, in our club, choose to ignore and continue on as best we can, until ultimately the worst case scenario (the club ending) becomes reality, rather than the bright and positive future we all imagine for this enterprise we hold dear. It may be something that washes over us and is far bigger than we can tackle despite our best efforts. I would like to think, however, there are options available to us that will overcome these challenges and together we can continue to be a strong, healthy and vibrant association.

In thinking about these issues we must confront the very real possibility that the way things have been organised and operated may not be the way they are in the future. Things may not (certainly don't have to) look or feel too different from afar, but structurally and fundamentally they will be different, sometimes very different (and likely to be in ways we cannot even imagine now?) in order to meet these challenges facing us. While this (change) may be a daunting thought it is also the inspiration and motivation for getting the balance right between needing to adapt and maintaining traditions.

One important aspect that I believe makes a strong, healthy and vibrant association is participation. Individually, involvement within the association is carried out, or embodied, in many different ways and this is to be celebrated. Encouraging participation across all aspects of the association is vital to success. So it is on this note I would like to invite all members of our club to participate in and contribute to the conversation about what our success and future will be. My question is, how do you think we can be a strong, healthy and vibrant association for the next.....years? Please share your thoughts and ideas with me by emailing them, phoning me for a chat, or writing to me. I also strongly encourage you to discuss your ideas with other members, committee members or contact the Club's Secretary (anonymously if you wish) to share your thoughts. The more conversations stimulated by this article the better!

Kind Regards, Ben Goonan
e-mail: bengoonan@hotmail.com, Phone: (03) 54463587
Mail: PO Box 28 North Bendigo VIC, 3550

Male Eastern Spinebill in the Dandenongs in February

Photos by Ian Brown

Can anybody identify these caterpillar-like looking insects? Some look like a pupa (already?). May be that is what the web is for? The host tree is not known.

Below: note the pollen on the bird's beak

Above: Correction from January/February *Whirrakee*
My sincere apologies about misnaming the beautiful bird on the front cover of the last edition (from Bill Flentje). It was a Spotted Nightjar and not an Owlet Nightjar.

Top left: European Goldfinch, a striking bird! (mid-November 2014)
Top right: The Australasian Grebe from the front cover spotted at the end of February. It was seen guarding young ones at that time.
Bottom left: New Holland Honeyeater
(these three photos by Michael Angove, all taken at the old tip site)

Middle left: Azure Kingfisher, the second photo shows off its bright red legs
Middle right: Nankeen Night-heron.
(Both photographed by Bruce Johnson at Barmah Forest during a boat trip on the Murray - highly recommended).

Left: These delicate constructions and their builders (*Glycaspis* sp) were discovered by Family Nature club participants at the last excursion (15th February) to Lake Tom Thumb.

Psyllids, which are sapsuckers, use the excess sugar they ingest to build their small exquisite (and sweet) shelters. The shelter is added to as the nymph grows (an uncovered nymph is shown also).

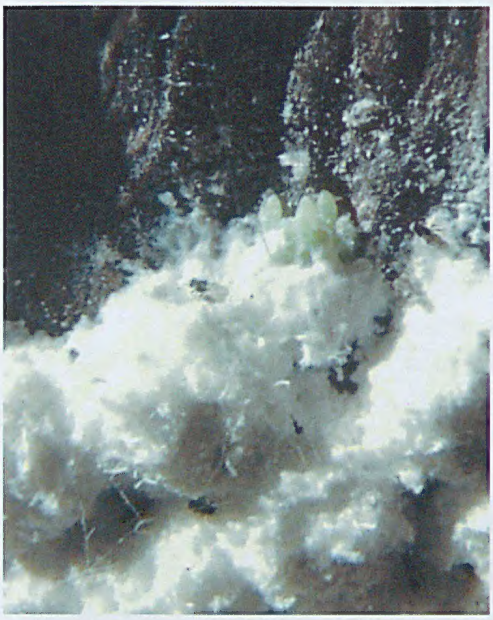
Lerps, psyllids and other sap-suckers

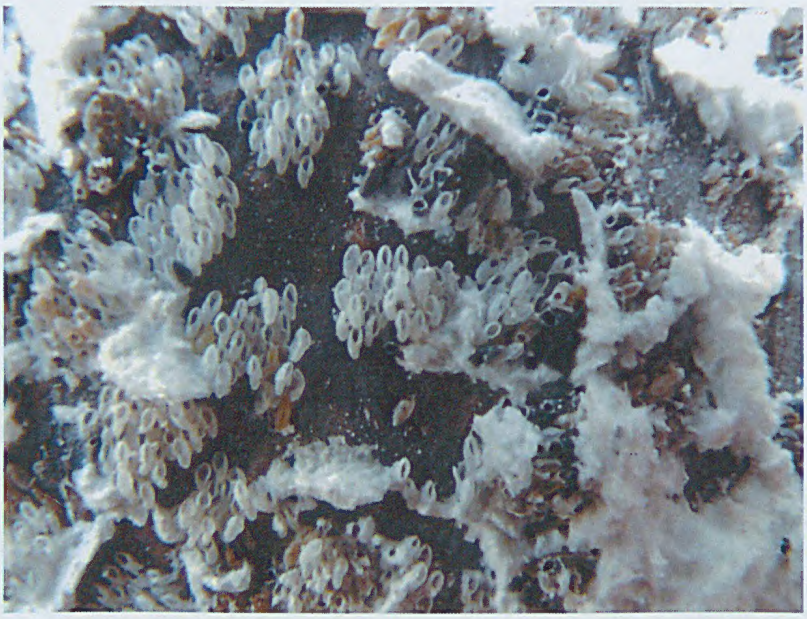
Left: Woolly Aphid (also known as Mealy Bugs) were also spotted by our sharp-eyed Family Nature Club participants at Tom Thumb. (both photos by Rod Orr)

Below: A typical patch of the colonies of *Platybrachys barbata* (a leafhopper = sapsucker) described in John Lindner's article on page 8 (Photo 1). Close up below left (Photo 2) (Photos 1-8 from John Lindner)

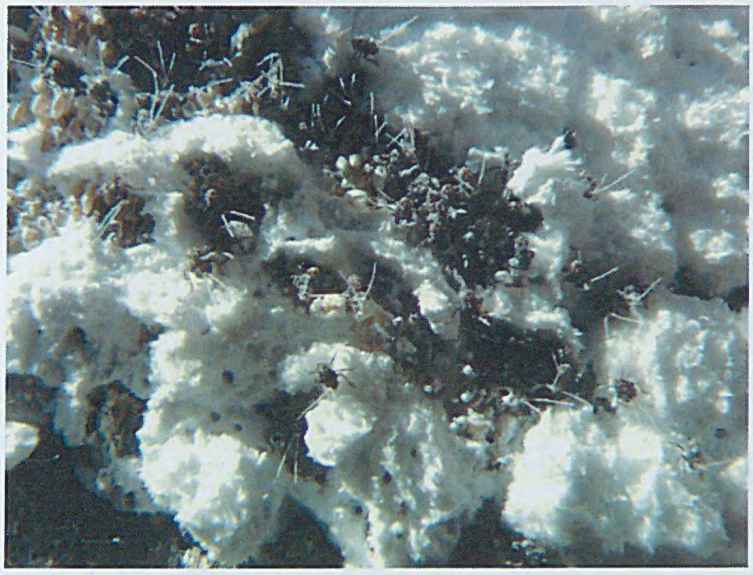
Adult insects of *Platybrachys barbata* at the top of the patch (Photo 3 and 4 below)

Below: Egg clusters, unhatched (left) and hatched (right) (Photos 5 and 6)





Below: Crawlers or nymphs (Photo 7)



Below: The foreign insects, possibly parasitic wasps (Photo 8)

A fascinating insect on eucalypt bark

by John Lindner

Introduction

Over the dreaded New Year period, I successfully escaped on a canoe trip down the Murray River. Mind you, it was organized 6 months before the event, as I was making final preparations to go to WA. I will go to just about any lengths to avoid the potential noise and horror of New Year's Eve. On our trip, we made some interesting observations of a particular insect on the smooth-barked River Red Gums.

In mid-January, I forwarded all my information and pictures to the Museum of Victoria Discovery Centre, with the promise that at least two experts in the field might be able to provide a validated identification, and perhaps a few more bits of information. Nothing has been heard in a month, and I don't expect it to, despite following the request up. You get so excited when someone on the phone seems to be taking an interest in your findings, but when it all seems to just disappear into the ether, it is a letdown. So in the end I had to do my own sleuthing. I am fairly sure my identification is correct. My thanks are due to Bob Jones who put me on the right track.

The insect in question

Order Hemiptera ("bugs" which suck plant juices through special mouth-par
Suborder Homoptera (leaf-hoppers, cicadas, scale-insects)
Family Eurybrachidae (Eurybrachid Planthoppers)
Subfamily Platybrachinae
Tribe Platybrachini
Genus *Platybrachys* (Gumtree Hoppers, most widespread genus in Australia)
Species *barbata*
Common name Teeth-marked Gum Hopper, so called because the marks on the back of the female supposedly resemble teeth.

Time and place

Location Murray River, between Chalka Creek pumping station to Hattah Lakes and Red Cliffs, about 120 k. of river.
Dates 30 December 2014 to 4 January 2015.
Event Canoe trip, Bendigo Bushwalking and Outdoor Club.
Species of tree River Red Gums (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*).
Notes Measurements are approximate - an accurate ruler was not available.
References
•Google – large eurybrachid planthoppers
•www.brisbaneinsects.com/brisbane_planthoppers/GumHopper2.htm
•Hughes R. D., Living Insects, a volume in the Australian Naturalist Library, Collins 1974
•CSIRO, The Insects of Australia, 1973

Large-scale observations (photo 1, page 6)

We immediately noticed large white patches on the smooth bark of River Red Gums, and the patches continued along the whole river trip. The patches ranged from the size of a hand to 0.5 metres long, and were round or oval-shaped. They were generally above 2 metres from the ground, some being low and others quite high. For my photos, I was lucky enough to find an active patch near the ground, accessible by building a pile of logs to stand on. Many patches (at least on the NSW bank) seemed to be oriented facing generally west.

Small-scale observations

White patches (photo 2, page 6)

The patches comprised soft, white, fluffy material, arranged in small, round blobs about 1.0 cm in diameter. Each blob formed a low, textured dome, with the centre slightly higher than the edge, and had a fluffy, cottony texture. The blobs were positioned touching each other, but each one was distinct. The cottony material stuck to your fingers if you touched it. The lower parts of large patches often had big holes due to hatching of nymphs.

Adult insects (photos 3 and 4, page 7)

These were "hopper-type" insects with a pair of wings visible from the top. The colour was generally brown, but with a camouflaging pattern of buff and black. The size was about 1.5 cm from the head to the tip of the wings. They had two prominent, brown eyes.

Viewed side on, a stylet could be seen folded against the body, pointing backwards. The adults sprang from the surface if touched or disturbed, but actual flight was not seen. The adults were only seen positioned at the top end or upper sides of the cottony patches. If the rear of the wings of a stationary adult were carefully lifted, the body could be seen vibrating over one of the cottony masses, and it was assumed that the adult was laying the eggs and secreting the cottony material around them.

Eggs (photos 5 and 6, page 7)
These were elongated, pale green, somewhat translucent and fragile looking. They were laid overlapping each other a little. The cottony mass was then deposited to hide them. The eggs were about 1.0 mm wide by a few mm long. After hatching, the empty egg cases could be seen in their neat clusters, formerly hidden. The cottony covering had gone, and we speculated that it might have been eaten.

Crawlers (first instar nymphs) (photo 7)
These were very numerous on the barer parts of the white patches. They were black, flattened and oblong and about 2 – 3 mm long. They had 6 legs and 2 long, pale whiskers at the rear. They appeared to be hiding amongst the white fluff. Could they have been eating the fluff as their first food? This could have accounted for the lower sections of large patches being somewhat bare, whereas the top part was intact. Could the fluff be a type of sugar or carbohydrate made as a by-product from the sap by the adults? The crawlers did not seem to be very active, but they were fidgety. They too would spring from the surface when poked.

'Foreign insects' (photo 8)
There were some other insects present too. They had a different body shape. They were black, had 6 legs and 2 antennae, and were about 5.0 mm long. There were fewer of them than the nymphs. They could have had any one of a number of roles – eating the fluff, eating the eggs or parasitising the eggs.

Conclusion
It was quite engaging to encounter an insect phenomena continuing over such a long distance.
The white patches were easily seen from the river as we canoed along. There was a lot of activity at each patch, so obviously the conditions were just right for the insects. I have never seen anything like this around Bendigo, but I have seen huge infestations of Cup-moth larvae (*Doratifera*) on eucalypt leaves in some years.

This comment may sound rather naïve, but I must say that finding masses of small animals doing what evolution has moulded them to do is a great antidote to the hypocrisy and lies we see paraded before us every day in the media. It is truthful, simple, elegant, timeless and incredibly beautiful.

Unknown golden moth from Grampians
(photo by Sarah Floyd in Nov *Whirrakee*, p6)
Colin Thomas from Maiden Gully wrote in December to say that he had seen an identical moth at Creswick in October, and that this moth also occurs in Bendigo in a lighter form (lemon yellow with an olive stripe). He has seen it at Maiden Gully and Salomon Gully in September, both times in native grassland.

Proposed excursion program for 2015
by John Lindner

Introduction
Excursion sub-committee
John Lindner 5448 3406
Alistair White (0419) 613737
Simon Hay (0410) 424686
Theoretical excursion scheme
- 6 excursions per year minimum
- Held as season and opportunity dictates
- Ideally will be the Sunday after the monthly meeting
- Suggestions for further locations and themes are very welcome, to be run at some time in the future.
- Most excursions will start at the clubrooms in Golden Square, except where noted

Excursions planned for 2015

1. Friday March 6 Half day Theme: **Waterbird count** (autumn – no 1), see back page

2. Sunday April 26 Full day

Theme **Wellsford Forest's big eucalypts (Red Ironbark, Yellow Gum)**
Leader John Lindner and possibly others
Location Meet at Golden Square, and proceed to the start at the junction of Ellesmere Track and Box Track, 14.0 km from Taylor Street, Epsom
Details 4.7 km (loop, return) walk to visit 9 large eucalypts
Notes We will use the club's field speaker system
Topics How such large organisms actually function. Measurements (height, diameter, volume, weight). The role of big trees in the ecology of the forest

3. Sunday May 17 Full day Theme: **Big Red Ironbarks at Bung Bong**

Leader John Lindner and possibly others
Location Property of Lindy Lumsden at Bung Bong, between Maryborough and Avoca, approx. 100 km south-east of Bendigo
Ironbarks This large stand of untouched, original trees is most likely the only one of its kind in Victoria. The trees have large diameters, very wide spreading crowns and are generally not extremely tall. Understorey growth is limited.
Transport It is intended to hire a 22-seater bus, with both the club and individual members contributing to the full cost
Note We will use the club's own field speaker
Details Walking, but not sure of the distance at the moment

4. Sunday June 14 Full day Theme: **Fungi**

Leader Rod Orr, Joy Clusker
Final date This date may change, depending on the season and whether conditions for fungi are favourable (ie early autumn rains, reasonably warm weather)
Location Babbington Road and Bullarto Reservoir (east of Daylesford)
Note This will be an event for the 70th anniversary, which visits haunts pioneered by Reg Smart (died 2013), once our pre-eminent fungi authority and photographer

5. Sunday July 12 Full day Theme: **Geology** Leader: Eric Wilkinson
Detailed notes and maps will be made available Location Volcanic area south of Castlemaine, with 13 stops (eg. Mount Consultation, Guildford area, Yandoit, Daylesford)

6. Friday August 14 Half day Theme: **Waterbird count** (spring – no 2) Leader: Jane Cleary
Location Coliban Water sewerage treatment works, Epsom

7. Sunday August 30 Full day Theme: **Wattles of the Bendigo area** Leader: tba
Location Greater Bendigo National Park – Whipstick and Kamarooka sections

8. "Long weekend" - Friday 11, Saturday 12, Sunday 13 September Activity: **Campout**
Leaders Alistair White, Simon Hay
Locations Mount Samaria State Park (between Benalla and Mansfield)

9. Sunday 18 October Full day Theme: **Botany (Spring wildflowers) and birds**
Leader tba Possible locations local, some based on 2012 SEANA excursion

10. SEANA camp (September, see back page for details)

Diary

All Club meetings are held at the Golden Square Senior Citizens Building, Old High St Golden Square, unless otherwise indicated.

Wednesday, March 11 **7.30pm**

Mr. Daryl Fleay, Local Nature Photographer
Will talk about 'Wedgies and other raptors - from an amateur's camera'
All are welcome

Club Excursions

Friday March 6 Half day
Theme: **Waterbird count** (autumn – no 1)
Leader: Jane Cleary
Location: Coliban Water sewerage treatment works, Epsom
Details: Meet 9.00 am in Wallenjoe Road at the bend where the entrance gate to the big pond is located, 1.5 km down Wallenjoe from Howard Street, Epsom
Activity: 3.5 km walk, observing and counting waterbirds, bring morning tea
Note: This excursion had to be announced at the February meeting – please accept our apologies if you missed this notice.

Sunday April 26 Full day
Theme: **Wellsford Forest's big eucalypts (Red Ironbark, Yellow Gum)**
Leader: John Lindner and possibly others
Location: Meet at Golden Square, and proceed to the start at the junction of Ellesmere Track and Box Track, 14.0 km from Taylor Street, Epsom
Details: 4.7 km (loop, return) walk to visit 9 large eucalypts
Notes: We will use the club's field speaker system
Topics: How such large organisms actually function. Measurements (height, diameter, volume, weight). The role of big trees in the ecology of the forest

More planned excursions are listed on p 10

South-East Australian Naturalists Network (SEANA)

The spring camp will be hosted by the Donald FNC
The dates are Friday 25 to Sunday 27 September
Participants either stay at one central venue or use local caravan parks
The club will receive publicity in due course and pass it on. There is a registration fee and other optional costs
These campouts are a good opportunity to visit other areas and see how other clubs run

Family Nature Club

The Nature Club activities will continue in 2015, so look out for announcements or check out their website.
Registration:
Bendigonatureclub@gmail.com or 5443-1326
http://bendigofamilynatureclub.blogspot.com/

Wildlife Rescue & Information Network Inc.

W.R.I.N. is an organisation dedicated to the care of orphaned, sick or injured native animals. It is fully endorsed by the Dept of Sustainability and Environment.
Please call our Emergency Number for Help for Fauna in Need. Phone: 0419 356433.
WRIN meetings held on the 1st Saturday of the month at 1pm the Golden Square Senior Citizens Hall

Bendigo Native Plant Group meeting.

All interested people are welcome to come along. Meeting starts at 7:30pm on the third Tuesday of the month, Golden Square Senior Citizens Hall.
Next meeting: 17th of March.

Friends of the Box-Ironbark Forest Walks

15 March Rise and Shine Bushland Reserve
Leader: Geoff Park. Ph. 0418138632. 4km
Meet at 9.30am outside 30 Templeton Street, Castlemaine (Continuing Ed.)